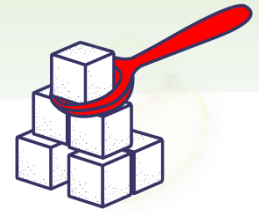




This fact sheet aims to provide information on free sugars and how to reduce your intake.

What is sugar and what are “free” sugars?

Sugars supply energy to our bodies; they can be classed as “natural” or “free”. Natural sugars are present in dairy products (e.g. milk, cheese, natural yoghurt) and whole/unprocessed fruit and vegetables. Many foods containing natural sugars also have fibre, vitamins and minerals and we should eat more of these foods.



The WHO defines free sugars as “all monosaccharides and disaccharides added to foods by the manufacturer, cook or consumer, plus sugars naturally present in honey, syrups and fruit juices”. Free sugars include those in processed fruit and vegetables, where the structure has been broken down e.g. smoothies, purées, and pastes.

How much is too much?

Guidance for %energy is the same for all adults however, amount in grams will change due to decreasing energy requirements with age. For average adults aged 16-64:

Upper Limits	Male (average, 2500 Kcal/day)	Female (average, 2000 Kcal/day)
Total sugars % energy	<18%	<18%
Total sugars g/day	112	90
Free sugars % energy	<5%	<5%
Free sugars g/day	31	25

All sugars, natural and free, contribute to total sugars that are listed on product nutrition labels. While total sugars are important to limit, it is the amount of free sugars that is of most concern and should be reduced or eliminated from the diet.

Did you know? . . . When sugar first came to Britain in the 12th century, it was regarded as a tropical spice like ginger and cinnamon; it was used by the very wealthy to season savoury dishes.

Risks associated with too much sugar



Free sugars are high in energy, so consuming them too often can contribute to weight gain, which may lead to obesity. Also, prolonged consumption of high levels of sugar results in resistance to insulin, a hormone, produced in the pancreas which regulates blood sugar levels. Obesity and prolonged high sugar consumption increase the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.



Other adverse effects may include: increased risk of heart disease, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, cancer, accelerated cell and skin ageing, depression, kidney disease, gout and bad dental health.

Sources of sugar in the diet

Sugar consumption mainly comes from:

- ◆ Adding while cooking
- ◆ Adding to drinks e.g. tea and coffee

◆ Many prepared foods

Potentially **high sugar** food examples include:

Jams, confectionery, sugary drinks, biscuits, cakes, some alcoholic drinks and mixers, pre-prepared sauces and ready meals.

Tips to reduce sugar consumption

- ◆ Always check labels; seemingly healthy foods can have a lot of sugar e.g. low-fat fruit yoghurts, fruit juice, ready meals, ready-made sauces. Be wary of low-fat foods in general, many use sugars to make them more palatable.
- ◆ Try to avoid artificial sweeteners; overuse can have laxative effects and may increase cravings for sweet foods.
- ◆ Choose low sugar alternatives or foods with natural sweetness e.g. whole fruit (apples, pears, grapes, melons and bananas), berries (strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries), oats, coconut, tomatoes, spices (cinnamon, vanilla), carrots, sweet potatoes, squashes, chestnuts, chickpeas.
- ◆ Gradually reduce the sugar added to food and drink—you may find it easier than you think!
- ◆ Cut sugar in recipes by 1/3 to 1/2.

Check labels

Many packaged foods have “traffic light” labels to help consumers identify the amount of energy, fat (total and saturated), sugars and salt (per 100g of product) in the food. If a “portion” is bigger than 100g for a food (or 150ml for a drink), there are additional criteria: if more than 30% of the recommended reference intake is in one portion, it will automatically be high/red.

Check before you buy! Remember to look at **all** highlighted nutrients; buying a product green for sugar but red for fat, saturated fat and salt, will not be a healthy choice.

Free sugars are not as easy to identify from food labels as other nutrients. Labels identify total sugars however, the ingredient list can help identify free sugars; the list shows ingredients in descending weight order, so the closer to the beginning, the more there is in the product. To identify free sugars, look for processed fruit and vegetables, the word “sugar”, words ending in “ose”, and other sugar forms. Words to look out for include:

Sugar, cane sugar, brown sugar, honey, corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup, dextrose, sucrose, fructose, maltose, fruit juice concentrate, molasses, treacle, caramel, crystalline sucrose, isoglucose, nectars.

Example—tomato based, pre-prepared, curry sauce

	Per 100g	Per serving (105g or 1/4 jar)
Energy	118 Kcal	124 Kcal
Fat	8.0g	8.4g
- of which saturates	4.5g	4.7g
Carbohydrate	9.1g	9.6g
- of which sugars	6.0g	6.3g
Protein	1.6g	1.7g
Salt	0.83g	0.87g

Ingredients: Water, **Tomatoes** (32%), **Yoghurt** (9%) (**Milk**), **Double Cream** (8%) (**Milk**), **Sugar**, Modified Maize Starch, Onion, **Creamed Coconut**, **Ginger Purée**, **Garlic Purée**, **Desiccated Coconut**, Ground Cumin, Rapeseed Oil, Ground Coriander Seed, Coriander, Salt, Ground Spices, Concentrated Lemon Juice, Acidity Regulator (Lactic Acid), Colour (Paprika Extract).

This product does not have a traffic light label; as a savoury product, it would be expected to be low in sugar (**green**) however, the label would be **amber**.

There are 6.3g of sugars per portion; some are **natural sugars** however, ingredients in **red** contribute free sugars. The ginger, garlic and coconut have been processed suggesting that their structure has been broken down and (at least some of) their sugars may have been “freed”. It is not possible to identify exactly the amount of free sugars however, based on the ingredients and their position on the list, it is likely that around 1/2 of the sugars are free sugars (“**Sugar**” is 100% free sugar whereas other ingredients have only a proportion of their weight and nutrients as natural and/or free sugars).

Check portion sizes! The curry sauce jar suggests 4 portions however, many people will make a Saturday night curry for two with the whole jar. Be aware of portion sizes suggested on **all** products, as they may not be the same as your own idea of a portion!

FoodSwitch UK

FoodSwitch UK is a free app which allows you to scan food and drink barcodes to immediately see whether they are **high**, **medium** or **low** in total fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt. FoodSwitch UK also looks for similar, but healthier, alternative products; this provides an easy means of making healthier food choices. [Find out more](#).

See related Fact Sheets for more information, in particular on [GI & GL](#); also on [Macronutrients](#), [Food Groups](#), [Common age-related clinical conditions](#), and [Tips for healthy eating](#).

To see our detailed nutritional guide and example exercise programme, visit our [website](#)



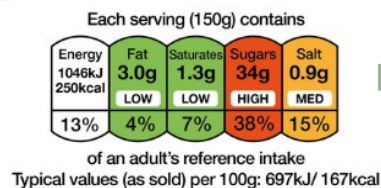
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**FOOD
GAMING**
FOR ACTIVE AGEING



Sugar Label	Total Sugar per 100g of product	Advice
Green	0-5g	Healthier choice
Amber	5-22.5g	OK to eat most of the time, but balance with rest of diet
Red	>22.5g	Eat only occasionally